

American

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Obama Nobel Peace Prize Donation: Posse Foundation

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer

In 2009, President Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize. The honor came with a \$1.4 million award, which the president donated to several nonprofits. This is the first of four articles about some of the organizations that benefited.

Washington — New Yorker Deborah Bial started the Posse Foundation in 1989 after an academically gifted former student told her, “I never would have dropped out of college if I had my posse with me.”

By “posse,” the student meant his group of friends — his support system.

Bial decided to set up a program that would send a group of students to college to act as a support system for one another. She wanted to create opportunities for secondary school students from less advantaged, urban environments — students who exhibit leadership potential but are often overlooked by traditional college admissions processes.

The foundation recruits promising students to join a “posse,” a small group that participates in a precollegiate training program and serves as an academic and social support system once students arrive at college.

Posses include young people from diverse backgrounds because “the leaders of this new century should reflect the country’s rich demographic mix,” according to the foundation’s website. Students are recruited from schools in eight metropolitan areas around the country.

The selection process emphasizes qualities such as leadership, teamwork, motivation and communication skills. Posse gives them full scholarships and sends them to colleges and universities in teams of 10.

“Posse completely transformed my college experience,” said Julissa Chavez, one of 500 students who received a Posse scholarship for the 2010–2011 school year. A biology major at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, Chavez said she is “very close to all of the people in my posse and am glad to have them by my side.”

Chavez said her posse was particularly helpful when she was a freshman, missing her family in Chicago — a seven-hour drive away — and tackling a difficult calculus class. “They are willing to come out at all times to talk about academic, social and family issues,” she said. Chavez is now in her second year at Carleton, after completing a summer internship as a medical research assistant at the University of Minnesota. She is spending

her fall quarter studying in Denmark under the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program.

The Posse program has placed 3,665 students in colleges and universities throughout the country. Students have won \$406 million in scholarships from Posse’s partner institutions and are graduating at a rate of 90 percent, significantly above the national average.

The program not only gives participants greater access to higher education, but it also helps colleges broaden the diversity of their student body.

“Posse challenges the current educational system to do better and reminds us that if we exclude some, it is to the detriment of all,” said Erica Spatz, a 1997 Posse graduate who is now a physician in New York.

In 2007, Bial received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, the so-called “genius” grant, for her work.

President Obama contributed portions of his Nobel Prize money to 10 nonprofits, several of which promote education, including College Summit, the United Negro College Fund, the Appalachian Leadership and Education Foundation, the American Indian College Fund and the Central Asia Institute.

President Obama donated \$125,000 from his Nobel Peace Prize award to the Posse Foundation in March 2010.

Panetta Cites Need for Greater Investment in NATO

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta told Europeans that NATO members need to take this moment to make the case for a greater investment in the alliance so it remains relevant to the security challenges of the future.

“We are nearing the end of a successful campaign in Libya, and are closer than ever to achieving our shared goals in Afghanistan,” Panetta said in an October 4 speech at Carnegie Europe, which is the Brussels branch of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

“But there is no doubt that this is also a time of challenge to the alliance,” he said. “The international security environment is complex and is rapidly changing.”

Many on both sides of the Atlantic have recognized that NATO nations are at a critical moment, he said. NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has warned about the risks of a weak and divided Europe unless it adequately invests in its own security, he said.

The United States and its NATO allies must depend on each other to share the burden of protecting common

interests, Panetta told Europeans. And that requires each country to commit to addressing growing gaps in NATO military capabilities as members confront the challenges of fiscal austerity, he said.

Panetta said NATO efforts in Afghanistan and Libya show the necessity and effectiveness of the alliance; both missions also show growing gaps that need to be addressed.

These capability gaps are being exposed precisely when every defense minister in NATO is dealing with increasing fiscal challenges at home, Panetta said. He noted that by at least one estimate defense spending in Europe has fallen about 2 percent a year for a decade.

"As a result, much-needed modernization investment has been deferred," Panetta said. The notion that the U.S. defense budget can cover alliance shortcomings is not true, he said.

"Make no mistake about it, we are facing dramatic cuts with real implications for alliance capability," he said. As an example, Panetta said that as a result of agreements between President Obama and Congress, the Pentagon will cut more than \$450 billion in spending over the next 10 years.

Defense spending and enhancing capabilities will continue to be a challenge for NATO alliance members, Panetta said, and will have to be addressed going into the 2012 NATO Summit that is scheduled for May 15-22 in Chicago. The NATO Summit will be held simultaneously with a Group of Eight Summit.

"We live in a world of growing danger and growing uncertainty, where we face threats from violent extremism, nuclear proliferation, rising powers, and from cyber attack," Panetta said. "We cannot predict where the next crisis will occur. But we know that we are stronger when we confront these threats together."

Panetta visited the Middle East to meet with Palestinian and Israeli leaders before traveling to Brussels for the annual NATO defense ministers' meeting October 5-6. The NATO defense ministers are expected to discuss current operations in Afghanistan and Libya, as well as security in Kosovo and concerns about maritime piracy off the coast of Somalia.

Syrian People "Slapped in the Face" by U.N., Rice Says

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — The Syrian people have been "slapped in the face" by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) because of its failure to pass a resolution condemning the

ongoing violence by the Syrian government against peaceful demonstrators, says U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan Rice.

Rice spoke in New York October 4 after Russia and China vetoed a measure that would have been the first legally binding condemnation of Bashar al-Assad's regime since it began its violent repression of pro-democracy protesters in March. The United Nations estimates that more than 2,700 people have been killed by the regime's security forces since the demonstrations began.

"This has been quite a sad day, most especially for the people of Syria, but also for this Security Council," Rice told reporters.

"The people of Syria, who seek nothing more than the opportunity to achieve their universal human rights and to see their aspirations for freedom and liberty achieved, have been slapped in the face by several members of this Security Council today," she said.

According to press reports, the United States had been working with other countries on a measure that would have imposed an arms embargo on Syria and targeted Assad and some senior regime members by freezing their financial assets and imposing a travel ban.

After weeks of discussions with other council members, the draft resolution that was submitted would have demanded an end to the use of force against Syrian civilians, the release of political prisoners and the granting of "fundamental freedoms" to the Syrian people. The Assad regime's failure to comply would have required the council to meet again after 30 days to consider "other options."

"The United States' view has been, and remains, that this council ought to pass a resolution that contains real sanctions," Rice said. "We supported this resolution because we thought it was a step, had it been passed, in the right direction."

But Rice said the 9-2 vote with four abstentions showed that good faith efforts to reach a compromise on the council's response had not been successful.

"The response today, I think, says the most about the people who were unable to support this resolution and those who cast the veto," she said.

The vote had been an opportunity "to determine who among us stand with the people of the region in their quest for a better future, and who will go to whatever lengths are necessary to defend dictators who are on the warpath," she said.

Rice said the Obama administration will continue its efforts to maintain pressure on the Assad regime.

"It is on the wrong side of history. It is not going to get what it seeks by the continual repression and killing and imprisoning of its people. It doesn't work and it won't succeed, and sooner or later that will be self-evident," she said.

U.S. "WILL NOT REST" UNTIL UNSC "MEETS ITS RESPONSIBILITIES"

In her October 4 remarks explaining the U.S. vote on the resolution, Rice said U.N. reports, such as from the Human Rights Council in Geneva, have shown that the Assad regime's attempts to mask its violence against the Syrian people "are as transparent as its promises of reform are empty."

After compromises, Rice said the vetoed resolution was "a vastly watered-down text that doesn't even mention sanctions." She refuted accusations that it was a pretext for military intervention in the crisis.

"This is about whether this council, during a time of sweeping change in the Middle East, will stand with peaceful protesters crying out for freedom — or with a regime of thugs with guns that tramples human dignity and human rights," Rice said.

"As matters now stand, this council will not even mandate the dispatch of human rights monitors to Syria — a grave failure that may doom the prospects for peaceful protest in the face of a regime that knows no limits," she said.

Rice said Syrians and others in the Middle East are watching the council's actions and can "see clearly which nations have chosen to ignore their calls for democracy and instead prop up desperate, cruel dictators."

"The crisis in Syria will stay before the Security Council, and we will not rest until this council rises to meet its responsibilities," she said.

Tunisia, United States Relaunch Trade Talks

Washington — The United States is re-engaging Tunisia in trade and investment discussions aimed at supporting that North African country's transition to democracy.

During the week of September 25, Assistant U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) for Europe and the Middle East L. Daniel Mullaney and Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Services and Investment Christine Bliss led a U.S. delegation in talks with Tunisia under the 2002 bilateral trade and investment framework agreement (TIFA).

The U.S. delegation, which included officials from USTR and the U.S. Embassy in Tunis, also held several meetings with representatives of the Tunisian private sector.

"The United States strongly supports Tunisia's transition to democracy and to an open economic system governed by the rule of law," Mullaney said. "We believe that enhancing U.S. trade and investment integration with Tunisia to increase economic growth and jobs is an important part of the support we can give to this process. We are pleased to be relaunching the TIFA and will propose holding a full bilateral TIFA Council meeting in the coming months."

In 2010, the United States was Tunisia's fifth-largest trading partner. Between 2009 and 2010, two-way trade (exports plus imports) grew 18 percent, following the upward curve of the entire previous decade. Two-way trade between the United States and Tunisia was valued at \$976 million during 2010, representing the United States' 96th-largest goods trading relationship.

U.S. exports to Tunisia in 2010 were \$571 million. U.S. imports from Tunisia in 2010 were \$406 million. Leading U.S. exports to Tunisia include miscellaneous grain seed and fruit, cereals, machinery, fats and oils. Tunisia predominantly exports mineral fuel, fats and oils, woven apparel, electrical machinery and precious stones. U.S. foreign direct investment in Tunisia was \$220 million in 2009, the most recent year for which data are available.

While in Tunis, the U.S. delegation met with a wide range of both private-sector representatives and government officials to gain a broad perspective on the economic opportunities and challenges involved in the nation's historic transformation. These meetings highlighted the eagerness of the Tunisian people and their government officials to engage in a process that will result in an open, transparent and competitive economy that will create jobs and greater economic activity in Tunisia and the entire North African region, according to USTR.

In particular, Tunisia hopes to use its highly educated, skilled and youthful population to become a regional economic hub, USTR said.

By the visit's conclusion, the U.S. and Tunisian delegations had established working groups to carry forward the work of the newly relaunched TIFA. These groups intend to develop work plans across a range of areas intended to support bilateral trade and investment and regional economic integration.

The work plans will include facilitating trade; promoting trade and investment (especially for small- and medium-sized enterprises); reducing barriers to investment in key service sectors such as information and communications

technology services, financial services, and clean-energy services; strengthening protection of intellectual property rights; and promoting the rule of law through greater transparency, including public participation in rulemaking, and fighting corruption.

These working groups are scheduled to report their progress at the first meeting of the newly launched TIFA Council.

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